

Three Words from the Risen Christ

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[0 : 00] I'm going to read from God's Word now, from the Gospel of John, chapter 20. And this is a passage that David is shortly going to come and speak to us from. This is John 20, verses 19 to 23.

If you've got a church Bible, it's on page 906. On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the door has been locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews.

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, Peace be with you. When he'd said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

And Jesus said to them again, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you. And when he'd said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld. Amen. This is God's precious Word.

[1 : 06] We'll return to that second half of John's Gospel, to those verses that Chris read for us, in John chapter 20, 19 through 23.

Do not disturb. You may have seen the sign, usually in some hotel bedroom door, indicating that people want to be left alone.

They don't want the cleaning staff to bother them, or anyone else for that matter. Other occasions, we may have seen a sign, private, keep out.

Maybe even it has a sign, a no-entry sign, stuck on the door. Well, on the evening of that first Easter, when the disciples of Jesus gathered together, they would, I suggest, have been more than happy to put up one of those signs.

Do not disturb. Private, keep out. Keep your distance. Leave us alone. John tells us here in verse 19 that they met together behind not just closed doors, but locked doors.

[2 : 18] They met full of worries and anxieties. They met in a room perhaps full of guilt, despair, anxious thoughts. For many of them, their hopes and expectations had been shattered by the events of the previous days.

Their leader, Jesus of Nazareth, arrested, crucified, dead, and buried. They gathered fearful, perhaps that they might be next.

They were men in hiding, wrapped up in a blanket of fear. They did not want to be disturbed. And yet, that is precisely what happens to them.

Because in that room, when they were closeted away in fear, Jesus came and disturbed their pity party. He came to them to comfort their fears and to stir them up to faith and action.

He came to meet with them, to speak to them, to reassure them, and ultimately to send them out into the world from which they were hiding.

[3 : 25] Here, the risen Christ comes to His people. He reveals Himself. And opens the door to let the good news of His resurrection out for all the world to hear.

Look with me this evening at three things that Jesus says here to His disciples then, and indeed to us today. The first thing that Jesus brings, really, I want you to note is a word of peace.

Verses 19 through to the beginning of verse 21. On that evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, Peace be with you.

And when He said this, He showed them His hands and His side. The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. And Jesus said to them again, Peace be with you.

The first words Jesus speaks to His followers is a word of peace. Here, Jesus is bestowing upon His followers peace, peace that He has won through His life, death, and resurrection.

[4 : 43] For centuries, the Jewish people had been looking forward to an age of peace. In the Old Testament, the Messiah was anticipated as the one who was the Prince of Peace.

Later in the New Testament, when Paul writes to the Christians in Ephesus, he tells them that Jesus Himself is our peace. Ephesians 2.14.

We know that the apostles went out into the ancient world preaching a message of peace. What is this peace? that Jesus brings to His followers.

At its root, I think it's not about tranquility of mind. It's rather about the absence of hostility between a holy God and sinful people.

The peace that Christ bestows is nothing less than reconciliation and peace with God. It is the opening up of a way into God's presence for those who are by nature His enemies.

[5 : 56] Paul tells the Christians in Rome, therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God. Three things about peace for a moment or two.

It's a compassionate peace. Jesus speaks peace, not blame, not fault-finding, not rebuke. You'll notice that He says that twice in verse 19 and 21.

And actually, He does so yet again the following week when Thomas is present, verse 26 of the same chapter. And whilst this was the familiar Jewish greeting, I think there is much more to it here than just that.

J.C. Ryle comments, the first words that our Lord spoke to the disciples afford a beautiful proof of His loving, merciful, tender, thoughtful, pitiful, and compassionate spirit.

There's a tenderness here about these words of Jesus. These disciples, many of them were broken men. They'd failed Jesus. They'd fled from Him. They'd failed to stand with Him.

[7 : 08] They'd failed to speak up for Him. They'd failed to go to Him. And yet, in the light of all their sinful failure, Christ comes to them and grants them peace.

Isn't that good news? Not a word of rebuke or condemnation, not a word of disappointment or exasperation, but a word of peace and reconciliation.

And friends, in all our restlessness and anxiety, in all our sin and guilt, in all our failure and weakness, here is the one who brings peace, Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you need to hear that tonight. Why? Because you know that you're a failure too. You've let Him down. You're weak. You're fearful.

You're fragile. Well, friend, if you are, then you're in the right place. Because as we gather this evening, the risen Christ Himself, in the power of the Holy Spirit, stands among us.

[8 : 10] And He speaks His word of peace to us. A compassionate peace. And a costly peace. When He said this, you'll notice what it says there.

He showed them His hands and His side. He spoke His word of peace to them and then revealed the scars in His hands, the wounds in His side.

He still carried the marks of crucifixion on His body. This was no ghost. This was no apparition. This was their Lord, a crucified and risen Savior, Jesus of the scars.

And here was the evidence that He had actually made peace by the blood of the cross, as Paul puts it in Colossians 1. Even in Jesus' risen and exalted state, the badge of His suffering, the emblems of His sorrow are visible.

Jesus shows them what it cost Him to bring them peace. And yes, of course, there is such a thing as cheap peace.

[9 : 22] In Jeremiah's day, in the Old Testament, the false prophets in Jeremiah 6 declared, peace, peace, when there was no peace. That's what happens when sin is downplayed or overlooked or ignored.

But the peace that Jesus has won was far from cheap. There was no overlooking of sin. God cannot and will not turn a blind eye to our sins and iniquities.

Isaiah tells us He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

And with His wounds we are healed. It's a costly peace that is to be found in the wounds of Jesus Christ. After the suffering, the brutal carnage of the First World War, the poet Edward Shilato wrote a poem entitled Jesus of the Scars.

I won't read it all, but here are some of the verses. If we have never sought, we seek Thee now. Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars.

[10 : 45] We must have sight of thorn pricks on Thy brow. We must have Thee, O Jesus, of the scars. If when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near, only reveal those hands, that side of Thine.

We know today what wounds are. Have no fear. Show us Thy scars. We know the countersign. The other gods were strong, but Thou was weak.

They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne. But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak.

And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.

What powerful words. Not a god has wounds, but Thou alone. And it's those wounds that still speak with power to our suffering and sin-sick world.

It's only Jesus that says, this is my blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. No one else says it. No one else can save you.

[11 : 57] No one else can rescue you. No one else can bring you to God. No one else has died for you. No one else can bring you peace with God.

John Newton wrote in one of his letters these words, And then he says, Peace flows from Calvary. Here's the peace that the world cannot give and cannot take away. The peace purchased by Christ's blood and sealed by his resurrection.

Those scars of Calvary are the everlasting proof that the atonement is complete. Rich wounds, as the hymn writer says, yet visible above.

The one who was pierced for our transgressions now stands alive, bearing the very tokens of his suffering as the badges of his victory. A compassionate peace, costly peace, also a conquering peace.

[13 : 14] Because the point of the text here is that Jesus is the conqueror of sin and death. He who was dead is now alive again. His finished work is a victorious work.

He has drawn the sting of death. He has wrought peace for all who will trust in him, all who will be united to him by faith. And the resurrection, in a sense, is really a reversal, isn't it, of the divine judgment of the cross.

He who made God to be sin for us is the one who personally knew no sin. He who became accursed for our sake is the blessed of the Father.

He who on the cross was the forsaken of God is the Son in whom the Father is well pleased. The rejected of the earth is the one crowned of heaven.

Herman Bavink comments, the resurrection of Christ is a fountain of good for his church and for the whole world. It is the amen of the Father upon the finished of the Son.

[14 : 23] Christ's death and resurrection, you see, cannot be separated. Christ was delivered up for our sins and raised for our justification. no wonder we read here, then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.

On that most special day in the Jewish calendar, the great day of atonement, the people would watch the priest going into the most holy place, the Holy of Holies.

There he would offer a sacrifice on behalf of the people. and the people would wait outside to see if the priest's sacrifice was deemed acceptable to God.

And if it were, the priest would come out from behind the great curtain, his life spared. The people would rejoice and they would celebrate. As he appeared from behind the veil, the high priest would raise his hands and he would pronounce a benediction upon the people.

Number 6, 24 and following, the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you what?

[15 : 41] Peace. And that's what we have here in John 20. We see the Lord Jesus himself emerging from behind the curtain through that heavy veil of death, alive once more, raising his nail-pierced hands and saying to his disciples, my sacrifice is acceptable to God.

Through me, your sins can be forgiven. Through me, your guilty consciences can be cleansed.

Through me, you can have peace with God. Here is the Son of God who loved us, gave himself for us, bringing us his peace.

Jesus speaks here a word of peace. That brings me to the second thing here. Jesus speaks what we call a word of commission.

Verses 21 and 22. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you. And when he said this, he breathed on them and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit.

God's burden for our broken and rebellious world, our lost world, is met by the Father sending the Son into the world.

[17 : 07] And then by the Son sending his disciples into the world. just as Jesus was sent to achieve salvation, so then Jesus sends his followers to proclaim that salvation to the world, to make

disciples of all nations.

The mission of the church is nothing less than the continuation of the mission of the Son. The Father sent the Son into the world not to be served, but to serve, to give his life a ransom for many. Now here the Son sends his disciples and indeed sends us into that same world with a message to proclaim. And I suppose these words of Jesus here represent perhaps the simplest form of the Great Commission, and that in itself is a great key to Christian service and witness when we remind ourselves that the Lord himself is the one who sends us out as he himself was sent of the Father. The church's mission in the world is to be like Christ's in some respects. Jesus himself didn't just appear, he didn't just arrive, he was sent.

That's how Jesus understood himself in his own mission. He was sent by the Father. I don't know, maybe around 40 times in John's Gospel we read about Jesus being sent.

[18:41] He was sent with authority from heaven. He constantly speaks in this Gospel of his Father as him who sent me. I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but to do the will of him who sent me.

I must do the works of him who sent me. My meat is to do the will of him who sent me. And as Jesus was sent, so we are sent if we are his disciples.

As Jesus came into this world, he came in humility, he came as a servant, he made himself of no reputation, he humbled himself, he washed the feet of his disciples.

And so, as we are sent, we are to follow him in that same path of servanthood. We are sent as servants, not masters. The apostle says, we are your servants for Jesus' sake.

Jesus Christ did not stand on his pride. He became the friend of sinners. He didn't stay at a distance. He drew near to people. He involved himself with others.

[19:53] He wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty. Yes, they called him the friend of sinners as a term of reproach, but were he not that, there would be no hope for any of us.

And so, we too, if we are followers of Jesus, are called to engage and connect with people, to make friends with others. Because the gospel, the good news, isn't shared at arm's length.

We can't spray people with it. It involves us sharing our lives with others in care and friendship. That is the way of Christ, isn't it? I remember many years ago hearing the testimony of a Japanese student come to faith in Christ, and this is what she said, my English friend built a bridge of friendship into my heart, and over that bridge walked Jesus.

who are you building that bridge of friendship with? Who are you connecting with? Who are you talking to?

But it's not only Jesus who is sent. At the close of John 15, Jesus tells his disciples that the Spirit will also be sent when the Helper comes. John 15, 26, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father.

[21:21] He will bear witness about me, and you also will bear witness. Jesus is sent with or in the power of the Spirit. His mission is given to him through the anointing of the Spirit at his baptism.

He's summoned there onto the field of service by his Father in heaven. Jesus was filled with the Spirit. He was led by the Spirit. His mission was in the power of the Spirit.

Jesus Christ, in one sense, was the very first missionary. An all-Christian mission is rooted in him, and the church's mission is modeled on the Father's sending of the Son and empowered by the Son's sending of the Spirit.

And I think this is why we have this curious, much-debated action of Jesus that follows directly after his words. When he'd said this, he breathed on them and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit.

What is going on there? Is Jesus here preempting Pentecost? I don't think so. I do not myself believe that Jesus gave his disciples the gift of the Spirit at that moment.

[22:33] His teaching about the Spirit in the upper room during the forty days suggests rather that what we have here is a kind of dramatic anticipation of Pentecost when he would pour out the Spirit upon them and adieu them with power from on high for their missionary task.

What is happening here is Jesus is confirming the promise of the Spirit with a sign. Just as before in anticipation of his death, he broke bread, he gave it to them, take, eat, this is my body.

So before the outpouring of the Spirit in anticipation of it, he breathed on them, he said, receive the Holy Spirit. And just as he enforced his word of peace by showing his hands inside, so he enforces the promise of the Spirit by breathing on them, an outward physical sign given to confirm and guarantee that promise of Pentecostal power to his church.

After this experience, the disciples could not separate the Spirit from the Son. They knew the Spirit was his gift, the holy breath of the exalted Jesus himself.

The same Spirit who hovered over the waters at creation, who descended upon the Messiah at his baptism, who raised Jesus from the dead, is now given to the apostles and to the church.

[24 : 10] And so the Holy Spirit along with Jesus is the sender of the apostles. That word apostle just means someone who's sent. And here is Jesus sending the disciples, sending the Spirit to carry on the mission of the gospel.

The apostles are being commissioned here to carry on the mission of Christ, not to begin a new mission. And friends, to be part of the one holy Catholic apostolic church means to be part of a community that has been commissioned and sent out by Jesus and empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

And so the church in every age is to be an apostolic community, and every Christian a witness to those around them. In fact, to the extent that we embrace this calling, it is to the extent that we embrace this calling that we become more like Jesus Himself.

A word of peace, a word of commission, sending. Thirdly and finally here, you'll notice that Jesus speaks a word about forgiveness. Verse 23, if you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven. If you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld. It appears such a strange statement, doesn't it, from the lips of Jesus. It seems to indicate that the disciples themselves have been given the authority to bestow or withhold forgiveness of sins.

[25 : 51] And for this reason, this verse forms the basis, for example, of the Roman Catholic teaching of confession and absolution, where the church is held to have the direct authority to forgive sins or not.

It won't surprise you that I think that represents a profound misunderstanding of what Jesus is speaking about here. Why? Because only God can forgive sins.

There is no instance anywhere in the New Testament of the disciples conferring the forgiveness of sins upon anyone. No, what we have plenty of evidence about is that the apostles preached forgiveness with assurance and with authority.

They declared to men and women that their sins could be forgiven in Jesus' name. They saw themselves not as priests issuing forgiveness to others, but as preachers proclaiming the forgiveness of sins that is only to be found in Jesus.

They offered to the world God's forgiveness in a crucified and risen Savior. And friends, the church's message as given by Jesus hasn't changed.

[27 : 07] Humanity's great need is still the forgiveness of sins. It's still to be reconciled to God. Sometimes in the New Testament, sin is described as being like a kind of financial debt.

Human beings were in debt to God. We owe Him obedience. We owe Him a life of loyalty, love, worship. We owe Him the devotion of our hearts. We owe Him glory, honor, respect.

But we won't pay up. Instead, we willfully ignore our Creator and serve only ourselves. And so, before God, we're all bankrupt.

No matter how hard we might try, no matter the good works we might do, we simply cannot square accounts with God. God, the debt we owe is of such huge proportions, we can never pay it back. We don't have the moral and spiritual capital. We don't have the resources. We all owe God, but we will not, and we cannot pay. We owe God everything, but we can pay Him nothing.

[28 : 16] And this IOU, this record of debt, is not a trifling matter. It's serious. It's a legal demand. And that's the desperate condition in which men and women find themselves before God.

But the good news is that someone else has paid. Jesus Christ has cancelled the debt. He's taken that IOU and He's set it aside, nailing it to the cross, as Paul tells us in Colossians.

And at the center of the church's mission, therefore, is this message of forgiveness, message of the cross. Our message is not justice for the poor, environmental change, better morals.

Our message is that forgiveness for sin and rebellion against God can only be found in the person and work of Jesus Christ, a crucified Savior.

That's the message we are tasked with proclaiming and sharing with the world. And if our message does not have that at the heart, it is not the gospel.

[29 : 32] Yes, of course, the gospel is more than just forgiveness. It is that. But it is not less. And Jesus was sent to reconcile sinners to God, to bring forgiveness of sin.

He was sent into the world to receive wounds, to forgive sins, to bring men and women to God. And the church is sent in the power of the Spirit to proclaim what Jesus has already done, to herald reconciliation with God and the forgiveness of sins.

Because that great IOU of sin and guilt has been wiped away by the blood of Jesus. What can wash I away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Think for a moment of all your sins, all your selfishness, egotism, anger, bitterness, envy, lust, pride, arrogance. Think of the charred sheet that stands before you, how extensive it is.

You have absolutely no excuse. The good news is that Christ has come, and He's paid what we owed.

[30 : 50] He's paid with His blood, with His death, with His wounds, on a God-forsaken cross. He's come, He's taken that massive IOU, He's nailed it to the cross, and He's paid our debt in full.

So let me ask you tonight, are you forgiven? Are you forgiven? forgiven? There's a tombstone in a New York graveyard, which bears just a one word inscription, forgiven.

There's no name, there's no date of birth, there's no date of death, there's no other epitaph, forgiven. But there's no single comment or commentary on a human life that is of greater consequence than that.

To know our sins, our debts, are forgiven, is to know the greatest blessing and freedom of all. Is that one word written over your life tonight, forgiven?

forgiven. I can tell you on the authority of Jesus Christ that if you repent of your sins, if you place your faith in Jesus, He will cleanse your guilty conscience.

[32 : 09] He will give you peace with God. He will cancel the debt you owe. He will grant you freely forgiveness of your sin. He will give you eternal life.

But if you turn your back on Him, if you reject Him and His gospel, then what are you going to do with your sin?

Is there someone else you are going to go to? Can you point me to someone else who can give you peace with God, forgiveness of sins? And there is salvation in no one else.

Acts 4, 11, for there is no other name under heaven. Given among men, by which we must be saved. Apart from Jesus Christ, we will end up carrying our own sins to the grave and to beyond.

Or we may not have a sign outside the door saying, do not disturb. Sometimes we would be as well. Because sometimes those words are written all over our hearts.

[33 : 16] Don't disturb me. Don't disturb me in my sin and guilt. Don't disturb me in my apathy and indifference. Don't disturb me in my self-pity. Don't disturb me in my despair.

Leave me alone. And yet the wonder of the gospel is that God has not left us alone. Christ has come. And there is someone we can go to to have our sins forgiven.

There is someone we can go to to receive peace with God. There is someone we can go to who will bring us eternal life. For in the gospel, Jesus Christ raises up those nail-pierced hands above our broken lives.

And we hear His voice speak into our guilty consciences, into our sin-stained hearts. Peace be with you. And that's good news.

Yes, sometimes it's hard to take in, hard to grasp. Such are our sins. It seems almost too good to be true. Surely, God cannot love me, can't forgive me, can't be favorable to me.

[34 : 25] But the gospel of the risen Christ tells us that He can, that He is, that it is true. Our sins may be many, His mercy is more. And so, whatever your circumstances this evening, whatever it is you're going through, whatever your struggles, look to Jesus Christ.

Look to the cross. Look to His wounds that bring healing and life. Come see the cross where love and mercy meet as the Son of God is stricken.

Then see His foes lie crushed beneath His feet, for the conqueror has risen. Friends, this passage is not ancient history.

It's the charter of the church in every age and generation. The same Jesus who came to that frightened band of disciples, huddled away behind locked doors. He comes to us tonight.

He says, peace be with you. He shows us His wounds. He commissions us. As the Father has sent me, I'm sending you. He empowers us by His Spirit, and He entrusts to us the message our world so desperately needs to hear Christ's glorious, life-giving, victorious message of peace and forgiveness.

[35 : 46] Let's pray together. Lord, by Your grace and mercy, grant us Your peace.

Grant us the help and encouragement and presence of Your Holy Spirit. Grant us to know for ourselves the forgiveness of sins and to share that message with our broken world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.